

July 3, 2020

The Florida Department of Health Reminds Residents of the Dangers of *Naegleria fowleri*



Contact:

Kevin Watler
Public Information Officer
Florida Department of Health in Hillsborough County
kevin.watler@flhealth.gov

Hillsborough County, Fla.— The Florida Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed one Florida case infected with *Naegleria fowleri* in Hillsborough County. *Naegleria fowleri* is a microscopic single-celled living amoeba. The amoeba can cause a rare infection of the brain called [primary amebic meningoencephalitis \(PAM\)](#) that destroys brain tissue and is usually fatal. The amoeba is commonly found in warm freshwater such as lakes, rivers, ponds and canals.

Infections can happen when contaminated water enters the body through the nose. Once the amoeba enters the nose, it travels to the brain where it causes PAM. Infections usually occur when temperatures increase for prolonged periods of time, which results in higher water temperatures and lower water levels. The peak season for this amoeba is July, August and September. *Naegleria fowleri* is found in many warm freshwater lakes, ponds and rivers in the United States, but is more common in southern states. The low number of infections makes it difficult to know why a few people have been infected compared to the millions of other people that used the same or similar waters across the U.S.

Though there are only 37 reported cases with exposure in Florida since 1962, DOH cautions those who swim and dive frequently in Florida's lakes, rivers and ponds during warm temperatures about the possible presence of *Naegleria fowleri*. Adverse health effects on humans can be prevented by avoiding nasal contact with the waters, since the amoeba enters through the nasal passages. As a precaution, health officials recommend the following:

- Avoid water-related activities in bodies of warm freshwater, hot springs and thermally polluted water such as water around power plants.
- Avoid water-related activities in warm freshwater during periods of high water temperature and low water levels.
- Hold the nose shut or use nose clips when taking part in water-related activities in bodies of warm freshwater such as lakes, rivers, or hot springs.
- Avoid digging in or stirring up the sediment while taking part in water-related activities in shallow, warm freshwater areas.
- Please note exposure to the amoeba may also occur when using neti pots to rinse your sinuses of cold/allergy-related congestion or conducting religious rituals with tap water. Use only boiled and cooled, distilled, or sterile water for making sinus rinse solutions for neti pots or performing ritual ablutions.

If you experience any of these symptoms after swimming in any warm body of water, contact your health care provider immediately: headache, fever, nausea, disorientation, vomiting, stiff neck, seizures, loss of balance, or hallucinations. It is essential to seek medical attention right away, as the disease progresses rapidly after the start of symptoms.

Remember, this disease is rare and effective prevention strategies can allow for a safe and relaxing summer swim season.

For the latest information about the amoeba please visit the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/parasites/naegleria/general.html.

###

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Follow us on Twitter at [@DOHHillsborough](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.